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**BARRY KEMP, *THE CITY OF AKHENATEN
AND NEFERTITI: AMARNA AND ITS PEOPLE*, LONDON:
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This book will without doubt be added to the bibliography of canonic items addressed to all who are interested in the history and archaeology of ancient Egypt, particularly, however, in the New Kingdom. Barry Kemp CBE, Emeritus Professor of Egyptology at Cambridge University has been conducting research and excavations at Amarna since 1977. Among his many monographs are: *A Survey of the Ancient City of El-'Amarna* (with S. Garfi), the multi-volume *Amarna Reports*, *The Ancient Textile Industry at Amarna* (together with G. Vogel-sang-Eastwood) and *The Main Chapel at the Amarna Workmen's Village and its Wall Paintings* (with F. Weatherhead), as well as the standard introduction, *Ancient Egypt: Anatomy of a Civilization*, as well as *100 Hieroglyphs*, *Think Like an Egyptian* and *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*.

The work is addressed equally to specialists and to all who are interested in the history and archaeology of the Amarna period. It displays high standards of publication, containing 287 illustrations in all, 53 of which are in colour. *The book also* deserves high praise because of its broad scope - it is not only about the site of Tell el Amarna itself, but also about the whole government system and background of the 'heretical' King Akhenaten and his intriguing consort Nefertiti.

The short-lived capital of ancient Egypt was totally abandoned after the death of Akhenaten (who died in the seventeenth year of his reign and was at first buried in a royal tomb at Amarna), and this is why the site lends itself exceptionally well to the study of contemporary court life, the lives of its prominent citizens (such as the high priest Panehsy and the vezir Nakht/Nakhtpaaten, the general Ramosse or Paatenemheb and the sculptor Thutmose whose painted

bust of Nefertiti was found on 6 December 1912 at Amarna by the *Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft* expedition led by the German archaeologist Ludwig Borchard, and even the daily lives of the people building the tombs for the elite. Special attention in this book is given by Kemp to the organization of the city planning (especially concerning the palace and the city areas). Needless to say, because both areas have been excavated, we have now an exceptional opportunity to learn about the contemporary lives of the townspeople of Akhetaten.

The new capital of king Akhenaten was completely abandoned perhaps three or four years after his death, and its ruins have in general lain undisturbed for more than 3,200 years. Paradoxically, therefore, thanks to these circumstances, today we are given an exceptional overview of the life and organization of one of the greatest capital cities of the ancient world, which functioned for only sixteen or seventeen years all told. Professor Barry Kemp, who has been directing excavations at Amarna for more than thirty years, is currently without doubt one of the leading experts on the history and archaeology of the Amarna period.

The successive works of Kemp thus far constitute a series of detailed and competent presentations of a whole host of questions concerning the functioning of the city itself in the economic, social and religious spheres. They provide the reader with unusually interesting information concerning not only the person of Akhenaten himself, but also the contemporary elite, and in addition to that, the author outlines the lives of the common people living in the capital city of those days.

The book starts with a *Prologue*, *Acknowledgments*, and *Explanatory Notes*, in which, among other things, the numeration system used for the buildings at Amarna and all the abbreviations used in the classification of the archaeological material are explained. This part of the book also contains useful information concerning the types of stone and metal which occurred in common use at el-Amarna. In the part of the book that bears the title *The Cast of Characters*, short biographical notes are presented on Amenhotep III, Queen Tiye, Akhenaten; Nefertiti; Meryetaten and 'Her Sisters', Kiya (a secondary wife of Akhenaten), and also Ankhkheperure (with the second cartouche name, or *nomen*, Nefernefruaten or Smenkhkare); Tutenkhamun, Ay, and Horemheb.

In the Introduction: *The City of The Horizon* (pp. 17-22), Kemp sets the scene (p. 17): *Some thirty-three centuries ago, perhaps 20,000 Egyptians, or maybe twice that number, followed their king to what was then an empty stretch of desert beside the Nile and built a city. To their king, Akhenaten, the land was part of a sacred territory called 'The Horizon of the Sun's Disc (or Akhetaten). We know it as Tell el-Amarna (or more simply El-Amarna or Amarna). Within twenty years, following his death and that of at least one short-lived successor, they were never to return. Gangs of workmen systematically dismantled the stone temples and transported the blocks away for re-use elsewhere.* The main body of

the book is organized into nine chapters (Chapter One. *Building a Vision*: pp. 23-46; Chapter Two. *Akhenaten's Resources*: pp. 47-78; Chapter Three. *The City of The Sun-God*: pp. 79-122; Chapter Four. *The Apartments of Pharaoh*: pp. 123-154; Chapter Five. *City of People*: pp. 155-196; Chapter Six. *The Quality of Life*: pp. 197-230; Chapter Seven. *Spiritual Life at Amarna*: pp. 231-264; Chapter Eight. *What Kind of City?*: pp. 265-300; Chapter Nine. *An End and a Beginning*: pp. 301-303).

The book concludes with the following addenda: *Visiting Amarna*; *Chronology*; *Abbreviations* (of works cited more than once in the notes and captions); *Notes*; *Further Reading*, and also a list of the sources used for the illustrations and an Index.

The work under review engages the reader in a wide scope of problems ranging from clothing (not only everyday and functional dress, but also elite forms of attire) to types of palace apartments or houses. Special attention is given by Kemp to the house of the chariot officer Ranefer (pp. 182-183, ills. 5.20, 5.21).¹ Daily life, centered around 'The Stone Village' (158, 190, ills. 5.4; 5.32) or 'The Workmen's Village' is also briefly sketched (pp. 190-194, ill. 5.30). Furthermore, the study contains information concerning the sacred space of Akhenaten, especially focusing on 'The Great Aten Temple' (pp. 87-117), 'The Small Aten Temple' (pp. 79-80, 86-87), the spiritual life of the city (see Chapter Seven pp. 231-264)², and the cemetery of the citizens ('South Tomb Cemetery').

In Chapter Four: *The Apartments of the Pharaoh* (pp. 123-154) the author answers such questions as: what was the palace and what function did it fulfill? (pp. 124-125), relying on the Hellenistic instances to furnish comparative material, above all on that remarkable palace builder, King Herod in Palestine (p. 124).

Chapter Six, *The Quality of Life* (pp. 197-230) contains information on the use of bronze: *Excavation at Amarna has produced sufficient bronze articles to show the range of things that were made in this material (e.g. 3.19-321), but it will never be possible to know if one kind was more common than another, or if certain utensils were more likely to occur in kitchens or bakeries or temples than others* (p. 197). The author then presents problems associated with the contemporary diet (pp. 218-221) and dress (see: *Looking your Best*, p. 226), not avoiding questions associated with mortality and disease effecting the contemporary inhabitants of Amarna, including child hypoplasia: Kemp cites the evidence derived from the anthropolog-

¹ See also B.J. Kemp, A. Stevens, *Busy Lives at Amarna: Excavations in the Main City (Grid 12 and House of Ranefer, N49.18) Vol. I: The Excavations, Architecture and Environmental Remains*, (Cambridge 2010); B. Kemp, A. Stevens, *Busy Lives at Amarna, Excavations in the House of Ranefer, N49.18), Vol. II: The Object*, Cambridge 2010.

² See also J. van Dijk, 'Tombs and Funerary Beliefs at Amarna' in I. Shaw (ed.), *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford 2003, 276-278.

ical examination of skeletal material (see: 'A Dark Side', pp. 227-229): *In a sample of 232 individuals whose ages have been ascertained, 70 per cent had died before reaching the age of 35 [6.33]. Many people thus had a much shorter lifespan in which to accumulate possessions and experience than is common today, and many of the scribes, guards, women of the house and people engaged in manufacture will have been in their teens* (p. 228).

Chapter Eight. *What Kind of City?* (pp. 265-300) contains an interesting discussion concerning the terminology which should be applied to a town as a politico-social organism. In this part of the book the author subjects to critical examination a whole series of elements constituting the formula of a 'town' and analyses the architectural space in terms of use, whether religious or social.³ In this section Kemp draws on the work of the American sociologist Gideon Sjober.⁴ In the same chapter Kemp also raises the problem of the presence of foreigners in Akhetaton, and also supplies an answer to the question of who might have been found living in the particular households built in the city (pp. 268-271). This chapter offers data relevant to calculating the total number of inhabitants of the city, the diversity of its accommodation complexes, also making mention of its workshops, including those producing pottery and faience (p. 281, see also pp. 283- 292). The production as well as the economy of the city of Akhetaton are treated with an unusual breadth of detail.⁵

Thanks to the multi-faceted approach to the presentation of the whole city (whose degree of urban planning had not been great, and in principle limited to the royal constructions situated along the straight avenue, the so-called Royal Road, linking its northern periphery (northern city) with the town centre), the reader receives an accurate and coherent overview of the everyday life of this short-lived capital city and cult-centre of the sun-god Aten. The picture of Amarna sketched out by Professor Kemp is realistic and convincing, although in the whole history of Pharaonic Egypt the figure of the very ruler Amenhotep IV remains provocative and enshrouded in mystery, even down to the present day generating a huge amount of controversy, much of it overstated, especially with reference to the radical religious changes introduced by the king. The book under review contains numerous illustrations placed throughout the whole monograph including models, visualisations and reconstructions (for example: The Royal Tomb (XLIII); Part of the Central City (3.1); Part of the city of Amarna, showing

³ See also M. Bietak, E. Czerny, I. Forstner-Müller (eds.), *Cities and Urbanism in Ancient Egypt, Papers from a Workshop in November 2006 at the Austrian Academy of Science*, Wien 2010.

⁴ G. Sjober, *The Preindustrial City, Past and Present*, Glencoe, IL, New York, London 1960.

⁵ See A.J. Shortland, *Vitreous Materials at Amarna: The Production of Glass and Faience in 18th Dynasty Egypt*, Oxford 2000; B.J. Kemp, G. Vogelsang-Eastwood, *The Ancient Textile Industry at Amarna*, London 2001.

the houses within the Main City (5.23); Model of the main part of the “House of Aten” (XXXVI); The North Palace (XXXVIII); The Workmen’s Village (XLII); The Grid 12 houses 5.17; reconstruction of the wall painting in the King’s House XX; reconstruction of the wall painting from the North Harem XXIV; etc.) as well as plans of the main buildings of the city, i.e. the temples, the palaces or the office buildings of the Central City (4.1) at Amarna, or on its peripheries. Thus the reader is provided with the means to imagine the pride of el-Amarna at the times of its fame as the capital city of Akhenaten.

Since Kemp concentrates above all on the numerous aspects concerned with the functioning of the capital of Akhenaten, the reader expecting a ‘lecture’ on the history and the government of the king, or a deep discussion concerning his reforms, will not find a great amount of information in this volume. This having been said, it is nevertheless necessary to note that the author does not avoid many questions concerned with either politics or religion, wisely weaving them into the main themes with which he is currently engaged. This allows him to engage in the question of the religious ‘revolution’, and, thanks to the presentation of a broad spectrum of the relevant source material, to overturn some of the myths bound up with this issue. The dominant view is that Akhenaten was a monotheist, generally not tolerating gods other than Aton (and particularly other solar deities such as Re). Kemp demonstrates that old established gods, especially those with an apotropaic character associated with the household, such as Bes or Taweret, but also Hathor (pp. 208, 224, 236, 239-244, ills. 7.11-7.15) were still worshipped at Amarna.⁶ Kemp even mentions an object bearing a prayer to Amun-Re (p. 236).

The latest work of Kemp is worth recommending to all who take an interest in the Amarna Period or everyday life in ancient times, whether they be historians or archaeologists. It is a valuable study, encompassing a wide range of source material, which the author takes easily, and eruditely, in his stride. There remain a host of questions not asked or answered. Kemp, however, in an effective way criticizes many common stereotypes concerning the king and his times and his revolution: *Since his rediscovery in the nineteenth century, Akhenaten has intrigued people, at the very least because he was a rebel on a grand scale. Rebels are interesting. What to make of his vision, as viewed from a modern standpoint, is more complicated. Nowadays, we are unable to view what Akhenaten did free from the idea – which developed long afterwards – that promotion of a particular version of god or the giving of spiritual guidance has to have the familiar shape of a religion, perhaps one that we can call Atenism. So, following a variety*

⁶ See also A. Stevens, *Private Religion at Amarna. The material evidence*, BAR International Series 1587, Oxford 2006; K. Bosse-Griffiths, 'A Beset Amulet from the Amarna Period', *JEA* 63, 1977, 98-106.

of modern ideas, he has been recruited to monotheism, to cults of the forces of nature or to more mystic interpretations of what governs the universe, even to notions of Aryan superiority. Although he was a teacher, I do not see [B.K.] that it was Akhenaten's intention to create a self-conscious community of followers or believers (...) A modern Atenism has to be an invention. But so what? The validity of religious experience is not to be overturned by arguments from history (pp. 302-303).

The City of Akhenaten and Nefertiti: Amarna and Its People will certainly become yet another classic in the already rich list of titles written by this author. Through his latest book Barry Kemp gives his audience a good chance to see Amarna come alive.